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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: NASSAU- CRIME SPIKE TRIGGERS DEMAND FOR HANGINGS

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. ZUNIGA-BROWN FOR R
EASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) SUMMARY: A recent surge in violent crime to include home invasions, rapes and murders have triggered calls for capital punishment to resume. The crime wave, attributed in press editorials to Haitian gang activity, also threatens to undermine the shaky Bahamian tourist industry. The potential for a high-profile incident leading to a public relations disaster for the tourism sector could devastate an already weak economy. END SUMMARY.

Murder and Mayhem

12. (U) Local media carry a steady stream of sometimes-shocking violent crime reports. The latest statistics reveal a 19% increase in violent crimes and a 25% increase in murders when compared to the same period last year. The yearly homicide toll now stands at 55. While most homicides are isolated to typically crime ridden areas, the 50th murder victim was a 29 year old mother of two who was shot dead in a residential neighborhood in front of her children. Although not publicized, the woman was a dual U.S.-Bahamian citizen. Media reports include frequent articles about the discovery of bodies in the middle of streets, in abandoned cars and gun shots victims who have survived attempted murders. Last week, two women reported being terrorized by a gang of 12 men at a secluded beach on the south side of New Providence.

Serial Rapist on the loose

13. (U) Five rapes were reported in eastern New Providence in the last month. Public outcry ensued after it was revealed that the perpetrator could be a serial rapist. The Police were faulted for failing to adequately notify and warn the public. In addition, the number of rapes and attempted rapes in the first five months of this year has surpassed the entire number of reported rapes in 2008. There were 69 cases reported by June 2009 versus a total of 63 for 2008. The Bahamas has the highest incidence of rape in the Caribbean according to a UN report on crime and violence. The media has also reported rapes in conjunction with home invasions and a recent high profile case involving a police officer who was taken into custody after allegedly raping a 15 year old girl at the police station.

Robberies and Theft

14. (U) Armed robbery statistics for 2009 remain similar to 2008 and the criminals do not generally appear to be targeting tourists. However, there were several incidents of note in early August. Three U.S. tourists were robbed at gunpoint in the South Beach area of New Providence Island after requesting directions. In addition, two British women were robbed at gunpoint and assaulted on St. Albans Drive in Nassau the same weekend. Non-gun related robberies have totaled 170 in the first 6 months of the year compared to 120 in the same period last year. Vehicle theft has also

increased.

Haitians accused of causing crime spike

5.(C) Recent newspaper editorials have linked the rise in crime to Haitian gang activity. Societal tolerance for Haitian immigrants was already at an all time low due to economic hardship and unemployment in The Bahamas. When coupled with the dramatic rise in crime, such rhetoric could become the spark that ignites ethnic conflict. Inner-city Nassau neighborhoods are most at risk, but the potential for conflict also exists in suburbs where new subdivisions encroach on existing migrant settlements. Conflict is also possible in outlying islands, which are proportionately greater affected by demographic changes or economic deterioration, and where the competition for scarce land and jobs is fiercer.

GCOB calls for Hangman to ready noose

¶6. (U) The Minister of National Security Tommy Turnquest announced on August 28 that hangings would recommence as a deterrent to serious crime. He also announced a new four part crime reduction strategy. The tenants of the strategy include targeting high crime areas and known hot spots of criminal activity; focusing on reducing the number of violent crimes; targeting repeat offenders and lastly; enhancing public confidence and reducing the level of public fear.

¶7. (U) Turnquest announced that the police had knowledge of who was causing the crime. He declined to provide that information to the press so as to protect the integrity of the investigations. Turnquest acknowledged that 250 police officers had been taken off their normal rotations due to the Miss Universe Pageant; but he did not attribute that action with leading to the spike in crime.

¶8. (U) The new crime reduction strategy was criticized by the opposition as a &public relations exercise that did not address the issues causing the crime. Opposition Member of Parliament Fred Mitchell criticized Turnquest for not addressing systemic police morale issues that were recently highlighted by Chairman of the Police Staff Association, Inspector Bradley Sands. Sands pointed to internal friction in police management which he said has had a detrimental effect on police focus.

Comment

¶9. (C) Calls for the death penalty to resume are well received by the public at large and allow the GCOB to be seen as being tough on crime. Even the opposition refrained from criticizing the announced resumption of the death penalty. While this tactic may temporarily placate the public, death sentences are unlikely to be carried out because the Privy Council ruled the death penalty unconstitutional in 2006. Although the crime wave has been mostly isolated to impoverished areas of the island, the ever present risk remains of the violence spilling over into tourist areas or in the vicinity of embassy homes. A high profile crime incident involving a U.S. citizen could have a devastating effect on the Bahamian economy which is suffering from the global economic crisis, numerous hotel closures, stalled tourism projects, cuts to public services and significant lay offs. Angry public rhetoric targeting the Haitian community as the source of the crime could also lead to ethnic violence.

ZUNIGA-BROWN